

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 28, 2006

PRESENT: Shawn Costello, James Gage, David Hurley and Walter Moody (George Nickerson was present, but was not sworn in so he was not seated and did not vote on any business)

ABSENT: Jesse Amsel and Glenn Eberly

STAFF

PRESENT: Rob Phillips, Town Planner and Reanna Goodreau, Recording Secretary

ALSO

PRESENT: Members of the Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Commission and Hockanum River Watershed Association and Farmers from the Community

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Costello called the Ellington Conservation Commission meeting to order at 7:15 PM.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

III. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Discussion with a Representative of the Connecticut Department of Agriculture regarding Land Preservation Efforts and Agricultural Incentives

Steven Reviczky, Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoA), stated that the State's goal for farmland protection is 130,000 acres. To date they have protected 30,750 acres on 220 farms. He noted that Ellington has some of the best farmland in the state. Mr. Reviczky explained the purchase of development rights (PDR) program in detail. A landowner must make an application to the DoA and then the DoA evaluates the application based on objective criteria, such as soil types. He noted that the DoA looks at the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development and/or policies to see that the Town recognizes the importance of protecting farmland and that the Town has a funding mechanism for farmland protection. He noted that if the parcel is accepted, the landowner has to decide how much of their land will be included in the PDR. He explained that once the development rights have been purchased by the state (and possibly jointly with the town or private land trust) the farmer can only do things that are expressly in the deed. For example, another lot could not be developed unless it was included as a part of the agreement.

Mr. Reviczky also stated that there are new programs available to landowners and towns. The Farm Reinvestment Program is available to farmers who are doing capital improvements for diversification or expansion of their production. The Environmental Assistance Program is available for agricultural waste projects. The Municipal Agricultural Viability Grant will be available to towns that are planning for agriculture protection and adopting farm-friendly ordinances and regulations. This also provides funds for Farmer's Markets. The Grant Program to Farms is available to farmers for value-added equipment.

THE COMMISSION RECESSED AT 8:25 PM.

THE COMMISSION RESUMED THE MEETING AT 8:37 PM.

2. Discussion with the Hockanum River Watershed Association

Doug Smith, Hockanum River Watershed Association (HRWA) chairman, came forward to explain their request. He stated that the HRWA would like to see the endorsement for the preservation of the Hockanum watershed and river in the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. Robert Phillips, Town Planner stated that the Conservation Commission has put this goal into their Open Space Plan (to be known as the Plan of Conservation). He also explained that this plan (or portions of this plan) will be included in the Town's updated Plan of Conservation and Development, which is starting this year. The commission discussed the progress of the trail with Mr. Smith and Ms. Julie Gross, also of the HRWA. Mr. Smith explained that most of the work on all trails in the watershed has been by volunteers. He noted that they would prefer trails that do not accommodate bikes or other vehicles.

MOVED (GAGE), SECONDED (MOODY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADD TO THE AGENDA: DISCUSSION WITH MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE REGARDING REINSTATING MONEY INTO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET FOR OPEN SPACE PURCHASES.

3. Discussion with Members of the Board of Finance regarding Reinstating Money into the Capital Improvement Budget for Open Space Purchases

Mark Joyse, Board of Finance member, explained that there is a \$300,000 line item for open space purchases in the annual budget that gets cut every year. He noted that the \$2 million in the Capital Improvement Budget requested by the Conservation Commission was cut and that the commission requested a referendum for that amount in the fall. Mr. Joyse expressed his concern about this and suggested that the commission request that the Board of Finance put \$300,000 into the Capital Improvement Budget for open space purchases in order to get through this fiscal year and then go to referendum for the remainder of the money this coming fall.

MOVED (GAGE), SECONDED (HURLEY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO REQUEST THAT THE BOARD OF FINANCE REINSTATE \$300,000 INTO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS BUDGET FOR OPEN SPACE PURCHASES.

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

1. Open Space Plan

Rob Phillips explained that he cannot make changes to the current Open Space Plan document or maps in a timely fashion. He suggested that the commission finalize their comments so that staff can contact Planimetrics to have them quote the additional work requested. Chairman Costello requested that they hold a special meeting to review all suggested changes to the document. The commission will finalize their changes in order to complete the plan.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION DETERMINED THAT THEY WOULD HOLD A SPECIAL MEETING TO REVIEW THE OPEN SPACE PLAN (TO BE KNOWN AS THE PLAN OF CONSERVATION). TENTATIVE MEETING DATE IS TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2006.

2. Development of Parcel Selection for Upcoming DEP Grant

MOVED (MOODY), SECONDED (HURLEY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 9:53 PM FOR THE PURPOSES OF DISCUSSING PROPERTY ACQUISITION. PRESENT AT THE EXECUTIVE SESSION WERE SHAWN COSTELLO, JIM GAGE, DAVE HURLEY, WALTER MOODY, ROB PHILLIPS & REANNA GOODREAU.

MOVED (HURLEY), SECONDED (MOODY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 10:05 PM.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION CONTINUED THIS ITEM TO THE MARCH 28, 2006 MEETING.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION TABLED THE REMAINING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA TO THE MARCH 28, 2006 MEETING.

3. Disposition of Funds when the Town Sells Land

4. Development of Deed Restrictions and Policies for Town-Owned Open Space and Properties

V. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. Plan of Conservation & Development Updates

2. Approval of the January 31, 2006 Meeting Minutes

3. Correspondence:

- a. Letter from the North Central Conservation District, 1/25/06 (Funding)
- b. Letter from Willimantic River Alliance, 1/06 (Funding)
- c. The Habitat, Fall 2005
- d. Email from Rob Phillips, 1/8/06 (Municipal & Private Land Trust Roles in Protecting Open Space: Opportunities for Partnership)

VI. ADJOURNMENT:

**MOVED (HURLEY), SECONDED (MOODY) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN
THE MEETING AT 10:06 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Reanna Goodreau
Recording Secretary